

VI

BOOK REVIEW

MARITAL INDIA*

Ex oriente lux ; ex occidente lex.—India is the very East indeed. Within its frontiers East and West do meet, but never commingle. A land of contrasts ; of light, but not enlightenment ; where blistering sunshine strikes fiercely across the eyes like a whip-lash ; where are deep shadows in which lurk unnamed things of mystery and terror. Days of smell and noise and unrest. Perfumed nights athrob with sounds and sudden silences. Creak of punka, whirr of electric fan ; the raucous syren of a Clan liner in the river, the soft pulsations of a distant temple gong ; Rolls Royce and bullock tonga ; missionaries, commercial travellers, British subalterns.

The Yacht Club on the Apollo Bunder, the Mall at Simla, and the New Delhi are all excellent things of their kind—but the death rate in the city of Bombay is 556 per thousand. In that city every second child that is born dies before it is one year old. For the whole of India, one-fifth of the total mortality is from infants ; and of these, 20 per cent. die within the first twelve months. When a child is born in Auchtermuchty, Wigan, or Llanfairfechan, his expectation of life is about fifty years ; but when an Indian baby is born he will be lucky to see his twenty-third birthday. Is it very incredible that there are men of India who are perturbed at such things ?

Professor Phadke is one ; and he has written a very sincere and a very brave book. It is that of a man who loves his own people, who looks back with pride upon the heroic past, who stands sorrowful before the degeneracy of the present, but who hopefully points the way towards the moral and physical betterment of his race. " Let us not," said Mahatma Gandhi, " put off everything till swaraj is attained and thus put off swaraj itself. Swaraj can be had only by a brave and clean people." Professor Phadke's book is not a plea for swaraj, but it is a strong appeal to his people to be both brave and clean. He realises fully, probably better than can any European, that the degeneracy of the Hindu has its roots in the sexual outlook and training of the people.

The sexual and marital darkness of India is profound ; and until the Light comes, the Law from the West can do little but palliate—nay, its end-effect may actually be to perpetuate. The Light must come from the East, from India herself, and especially from her women. It is to be hoped that Professor Phadke's taper may set alight the funeral pyre of child marriage and all the evils which throng in its train. Suttee was abolished by the Law because it offended the susceptibilities of the West rather than because it was abhorred by the

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widow ; only the Light from within can save her from the fate she escaped when she threw herself upon the fire.

What specially interests the venereologist is the chapter dealing with disease and vice. The author insists that the suppression of syphilis and gonorrhœa is, from the eugenic point of view, a matter of supreme importance. It is rather a pity, however, that he exaggerates upon the subject of venereal disease. It is not true, for example, that "medical experts are agreed in the opinion that the complete cure of venereal disease is impossible," and that when "once this disease gets lodgment in a man's body, there is only one time when it loses its grip—when death lays its 'icy hand' upon him."

So far as venereal disease is concerned, both Light and Law—and indeed syphilis itself—have come to India out of the West. The venereal population of India is staggering ; and the urgent need for grappling with the problem upon modern lines was stressed by the British Social Hygiene Delegation to India two years ago. It was recommended that highly trained experts in venereal diseases be appointed to initiate and carry out schemes of treatment in the larger cities. Not until such posts are created and are filled by men of the highest standing, not only as venereologists but as administrators, will the situation begin to change. The need for such an appointment was recognised by the Port Health Officer of Bombay, for in a recent memorandum to the Surgeon-General with the Government of Bombay, he states that there is "a deplorable lack of facilities for treatment of venereal diseases in Bombay hospitals and there is not a medical staff with the necessary expert knowledge fit to teach students and post-graduates in this subject. . . . The first step necessary is to obtain the services of a specialist who has had practical experience not only of the treatment of venereal diseases, but also of ante-natal and welfare work, and social hygiene schemes." In this way alone does efficiency lie.

Professor Phadke's book is to be recommended to all who are interested in problems of Social Hygiene as they affect India. The somewhat slovenly printing, the poor quality of the paper, and the generally slipshod get-up of the book are typical of the productions of the native publishing houses and constitute a reflex of that very degeneracy which Professor Phadke seeks to remedy.

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